

## STAFF REPORT

TO: Finance Committee Date: August 11, 2009

VIA: Gary Jackson, City Manager

FROM: Jonathan Feldman, Director, Information Technology Services

SUBJECT: American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and the  
Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP)

Summary Statement: The consideration of policy authorizing staff to provide in-kind services as a grant match in conjunction with a community ARRA/BTOP grant application.

Review: The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) has authorized a grant program known as the Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP). Because of grant characteristics, staff has determined that the highest probability of successful application will come through collaboration with community groups, with ERC Broadband acting as the lead applicant for a fiber optic 'middle mile' infrastructure grant. This is consistent with policy direction discussed at the 9-16-2006 City Council meeting (previous staff report attached). Moreover, the multiple purposes and objectives of BTOP leads staff to believe that collaborative applications will be more likely to be funded.

The BTOP program represents the best opportunity to build out infrastructure that will enhance the City's operations, specifically, to provide failure resilient / redundant high speed links to public safety sites (including tower sites); and to provide high speed links to recreation centers to support future programming.

Buncombe BTOP grant stakeholders include:

**Asheville Housing Authority** – Needs include high speed networking for interfacing of camera systems to City public safety entities

**Asheville City Schools** – City School representatives have expressed great interest in many aspects of BTOP

**Buncombe County** – The County operates the Public Safety Primary Answering Point (PSAP); County libraries operate computer centers in the area, with plans to expand.

**ERC (Education Research Consortium) Broadband** – An established "middle mile" provider, with a track record of serving education and public entities in Western North Carolina

**MAIN (Mountain Area Information Network)** – An established "last mile" provider, with a track record of serving underserved communities and working with the Housing Authority

**North Carolina State Highway Patrol** – The City's public safety agencies frequently partner with the NC State Highway Patrol.

**Parks & Rec partner agencies** – Examples include Partners Unlimited at the Reid Center and the Burton Street Community Association at the Burton Center

In-kind contributions that have little effect on operations will positively influence the grant application. Therefore, staff recommends in-kind support of the lead grant applicants in the applications for BTOP funding, with stipulations for permanent City use of any funded infrastructure.

Pros: Serve unfunded operational needs for both public safety and non-public safety departments. Collaborate with community stakeholders for mutual benefit without significant impact to local taxpayers. Creates & retains local jobs and contracts via \$5.5M of investment in the region. Allows broadband not-for-profits to apply their expertise to the build-out rather than having to develop in-house broadband expertise.

Cons: Control and execution risks associated with the City not being the primary grant applicant.

Recommendation: Authorize the City manager to direct city staff to assist and provide in-kind support for a collaborative BTOP grant application, and to provide letters of support and intent regarding ongoing usage rights and responsibilities of infrastructure relating to City operations.

Attachment:

- 1) Staff report of 9-16-2006
- 2) Proposed infrastructure builds